

# Grocery Stores

(SIC 541)

## SIGNIFICANT POINTS

- Numerous job openings—many of them part time—should be available due to the industry's large size and high rate of turnover.
- Cashiers and stock clerks account for over half of all jobs.
- The retail food industry will seek college graduates to fill most new management positions.

### Nature of the Industry

Grocery stores, also known as supermarkets, are familiar to everyone. They sell an array of fresh and preserved foods, primarily for preparation and consumption at home. Increasingly, they also sell prepared food for takeout meals, such as hot entrees and salads. Stores range in size from supermarkets, which may employ hundreds of workers and sell numerous food and nonfood items, to convenience stores, with small staffs and limited selections. (Specialty grocery stores—meat, seafood, and vegetable markets; fruit, candy, health, and dietetic food stores; and bakeries, for example—are not covered in this section. Also excluded are eating and drinking establishments that sell foods and beverages for consumption on the premises, which are discussed elsewhere in the *Career Guide*.)

Grocery stores are found everywhere, although the size of the establishment and range of goods and services offered varies. Traditionally, inner-city stores are small and offer a limited selection, although larger stores are now being built in many urban areas; suburban stores tend to be large supermarkets with a diverse stock. Many supermarkets include several specialty departments that offer the products and services of bakeries, delicatessens, pharmacies, or florist shops. Household goods, health and beauty care items, automotive supplies, greeting cards, and clothing also are among the growing range of nonfood items sold. Some of the largest supermarkets even house cafeterias or food courts, and a few feature convenience stores. In addition, grocery stores increasingly offer basic banking services, such as personal check cashing, money orders, and automatic teller machines; postal services, such as mail boxes and postage stamps; on-site film processing; dry cleaning; video rentals; and catering services.

### Working Conditions

Working conditions in most grocery stores are pleasant, with clean, well-lighted, climate-controlled surroundings. Work can be hectic, however, and dealing with customers sometimes can be stressful.

Grocery stores are open to the public many hours each day, so workers are needed for early morning, late night, weekend, and holiday work. With employees working fewer than 30 hours a week, on average, these jobs are particularly attractive to workers who have other family or school responsibilities or another job.

Most grocery store workers wear some sort of clothing, such as a jacket or apron, that identifies them as store employees and keeps their personal clothing clean. Health and safety regulations require some workers, such as those who work in the delicatessen or meat departments, to wear head coverings, safety glasses, or gloves.

In 1997, cases of work-related injury and illness averaged 9.6 per 100 full-time workers in grocery stores, compared to 7.1 per 100 full-time workers in the entire private sector. Some injuries occur while transporting or stocking goods. Butchers and meat, poultry, and fish cutters, as well as cashiers working with computer scanners or traditional cash registers, may be vulnerable to cumulative trauma and other repetitive motion injuries.

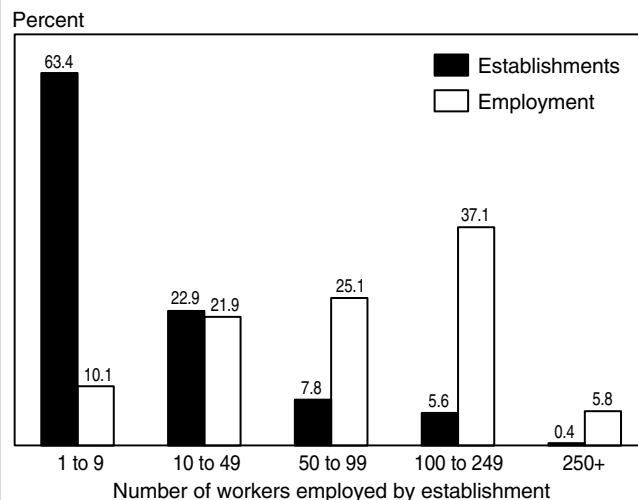
### Employment

Grocery stores ranked among the largest industries in 1998, providing just under 3.1 million wage and salary jobs. Over 32 percent of all grocery store employees work part time and the average workweek is less than 30 hours. An estimated 93,000 self-employed workers also worked in grocery stores, mostly in smaller establishments.

In 1997, about 131,000 grocery stores operated throughout the Nation. Most grocery stores are small; over 60 percent employ fewer than 10 workers. Most jobs, however, are found in the largest stores. About two-thirds of workers were employed in grocery stores with more than 50 workers (chart).

Many grocery store workers are young, with persons 16 to 24 years old holding 35 percent of the jobs. This reflects the large number of jobs in this industry open to young workers who have little experience.

**Although most establishments are small, about two-thirds of workers were employed in grocery stores with more than 50 workers**



Source: U.S. Department of Commerce, *County Business Patterns*, 1997

## Occupations in the Industry

Grocery store workers perform a variety of tasks. These include stocking shelves on the sales floor; preparing food and other goods; assisting customers in locating, purchasing, and understanding the content and uses of various items; and providing support services to the establishment. If the store is part of a chain, then many important tasks are done at a centralized corporate headquarters. They include marketing and promotion, inventory control and management, and financing. However, over half of all grocery store employees are cashiers or stocks clerks.

*Cashiers*, sometimes called checkers, comprise the largest occupation in grocery stores, accounting for about 3 of every 10 workers (table 1). They scan the items being purchased by customers, total the amount due, and produce a cash register receipt that shows the quantity and price of the items. In most supermarkets, the cashier passes the universal product code on the item's label across a computer scanner that identifies the item and its price, which is automatically relayed to the cash register. In other grocery stores, the cashier reads a hand-stamped price on the item and keys that price directly into the cash register. Cashiers then place items in bags for customers; accept cash, personal check, credit card, or an electronic debit card in payment; and make change. When cashiers are not needed to check out customers, they sometimes assist other workers.

*Stock clerks* comprise the second largest occupation in grocery stores, accounting for 2 of every 10 workers. They fill the shelves with merchandise and arrange displays to attract customers' attention. In stores without computer scanning equipment, stock clerks may have to manually mark prices on individual items and count stock for inventory control.

**Table 1. Employment of wage and salary workers in grocery stores by occupation, 1998 and projected change, 1998-2008**  
(Employment in thousands)

Occupation	1998		1998-2008 Percent change
	Number	Percent	
<b>All occupations</b> .....	3,066	100.0	5.7
<b>Marketing and sales</b> .....	1,313	42.8	11.5
Cashiers .....	976	31.8	12.0
Marketing and sales worker supervisors .....	195	6.4	13.0
Retail salespersons .....	104	3.4	6.6
<b>Administrative support, including clerical</b> .....	807	26.3	-10.2
Stock clerks and order fillers .....	669	21.8	-12.3
Bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks .....	42	1.4	-10.8
General office clerks .....	31	1.0	10.6
<b>Service</b> .....	393	12.8	19.6
Food preparation workers .....	133	4.3	20.5
Food counter, fountain, and related workers .....	116	3.8	31.5
Bakers, bread and pastry .....	64	2.1	23.4
Janitors and cleaners .....	24	0.8	-1.4
<b>Operators, fabricators, and laborers</b> ...	285	9.3	10.0
Hand packers and packagers .....	225	7.3	9.6
<b>Precision production, craft, and repair</b> .....	131	4.3	-10.2
Butchers and meatcutters .....	115	3.7	-12.3
<b>Executive, administrative, and managerial</b> .....	110	3.6	4.8
General managers and top executives .....	74	2.4	6.4
Management support occupations ...	16	0.5	3.0
<b>All other occupations</b> .....	27	0.9	31.2

Many office clerical workers, such as *secretaries*, *general office clerks*, and *bookkeeping, accounting, and auditing clerks*, type, file, and maintain the records necessary to keep grocery stores running smoothly. *Hand packers and packagers*, also known as courtesy clerks or baggers, perform a variety of simple tasks, such as bagging groceries, loading parcels in customers' cars, and returning unpurchased merchandise from the checkout counter to shelves.

*Butchers* and *meat, poultry, and fish cutters* prepare meat, poultry, and fish for purchase by cutting up and trimming carcasses and large sections into consumer-sized pieces, which they package, weigh, price, and place on display. They also prepare ground meat from other cuts and fill customers' special orders. Butchers and meat, poultry, and fish cutters also may prepare ready-to-heat foods by filleting or cutting meat, poultry or fish into bite-sized pieces, preparing and adding vegetables, or applying sauces or breading.

Some specialty workers prepare food for sale in the grocery store and work in kitchens that may not be located in the store. *Bakers* produce breads, rolls, cakes, cookies, and other baked goods. *Food preparation workers* make salads—such as coleslaw or potato, macaroni, or chicken salad—and other entrees, and they prepare ready-to-heat foods—such as burritos, marinated chicken breasts, or chicken stir-fry—for sale in the delicatessen or in the gourmet food or meat department. Other food preparation workers arrange party platters or prepare various vegetables and fruits that are sold at the salad bar.

In supermarkets that serve food and beverages for consumption on the premises, *food counter workers* take orders and serve customers at counters. They may prepare short order items, such as salads or sandwiches, to be taken out and consumed elsewhere. *Janitors* and *cleaners* keep the stores clean and orderly.

In the warehouses and stockrooms of large supermarkets, *freight, stock, and material movers* move stock and goods in storage and deliver them to the sales floor; they also help load and unload delivery trucks.

*Department managers* direct the grocery, produce, meat, and other specialty departments, supervising mostly entry level employees. Department managers train employees and schedule their hours; oversee ordering, inspection, pricing, and inventory of goods; monitor sales activity; and make reports to store managers. *Store managers* are responsible for the efficient and profitable operation of grocery stores. Working through their department managers, store managers may assist in setting store policy, hire and train employees, develop merchandising plans, maintain good customer and community relations, address customer complaints, and monitor the store's profits or losses.

*Purchasing managers* plan and direct the activities of *buyers*, who purchase goods for resale to consumers. Purchasing managers and buyers must thoroughly understand grocery store foods and other items, and they must select the best suppliers and maintain good relationships with them. Purchasing managers and buyers evaluate their store's sales reports to determine what products are in demand and plan purchases according to their budget.

Because of the expansion of the industry to meet the consumers' desire for "one-stop shopping," grocery stores have begun to employ a wide array of workers to help meet that need. For example, *marketing managers* forecast sales and

develop a marketing plan based on demographic trends, sales data, community needs, and consumer feedback. *Consumer affairs specialists* provide information to help consumers choose among the many food and nonfood products, and develop nutrition education programs. *Pharmacists* fill customers' drug prescriptions and advise them on over-the-counter medicines. *Computer programmers* and *computer systems analysts* develop management information systems. *Inspectors, testers,* and *graders* assess whether products and facilities meet quality, health, and safety standards. *Human resources* and *training specialists* are responsible for making sure that employees maintain and, if necessary, improve their skill levels.

### Training and Advancement

Most grocery store jobs are entry level and can be learned in a short time. Employers generally prefer high school graduates for occupations such as cashier, stock clerk, or counter worker. In large supermarket chains, prospective employees are matched with available jobs, hours, and locations, and they are sent to a specific store for on-the-job training. Many cashiers are trained in a few days, with some stores offering formal classroom training to familiarize workers with the equipment they will work with. Meatcutters and bakers are more skilled. Trade schools and industry associations offer training for these jobs, but the skills also can be learned on the job.

Graduates of technical institutes, junior and community colleges, and colleges and universities that offer programs in food marketing, food management, and supermarket management are increasingly being sought after. Many supermarket chains seek graduates of these programs, or of bachelor's or master's degree programs in business administration, to enter various professional positions or management training programs in areas such as logistics, replenishment, food safety, human resources, and strategic planning. Management trainees start as assistant or department manager and, depending on experience and performance, may advance to positions of greater responsibility. It is not unusual for managers to supervise a large number of employees early in their careers.

Courtesy clerks sometimes advance to work as service clerks in the delicatessen or bakery, stock clerks, or perhaps cashiers. Sometimes workers rotate assignments in a supermarket; for example, a cashier might occasionally wrap meat. Union contracts, however, may have strict occupational definitions in some stores, making movement among departments difficult.

Entry level workers may advance to management positions, depending on experience and performance. Grocery store management has become increasingly complex and technical. Managers of some large supermarkets are responsible for millions of dollars in yearly revenue and hundreds of employees. They use computers to manage budgets, schedule work, track and order products, price goods, manage shelf space, and assess product profitability. Many stores that promote from within have established tracks by which workers move from department to department, gaining broad experience, until they are considered ready for an entry-level management position. Opportunities for advancement to management jobs exist in both large supermarket chains and in small, independent grocery stores.

Grocery store jobs call for various personal attributes. Almost all workers must be in good physical condition.

Because managers, cashiers, stock clerks, and other workers on the sales floor constantly deal with the public, a neat appearance and a pleasant, businesslike manner are important. Cashiers and stock clerks must be able to do repetitious work accurately while under pressure. Cashiers need basic arithmetic skills, good hand-eye coordination, and manual dexterity. Stock clerks, especially, must be in good physical condition because of the lifting, crouching, and climbing they do. For managers, good communication skills, and the ability to solve problems quickly and perform well under pressure, are important.

### Earnings

Average weekly earnings in grocery stores are considerably lower than the average for all industries, reflecting the large proportion of entry level, part-time jobs. In 1998, nonsupervisory workers in grocery stores averaged \$276 a week, compared to \$442 a week for all workers in the private sector. Earnings in selected occupations in grocery stores appear in table 2.

Managers receive a salary and often a bonus based on store or department performance. Managers in highly profitable stores generally earn more than those in less profitable stores.

Full-time workers generally receive typical benefits, such as paid vacations, sick leave, and health and life insurance. Part-time workers who are not unionized may receive few benefits. Unionized part-time workers sometimes receive partial benefits. Grocery store employees may receive a discount on purchases.

About one-fourth of all employees in grocery stores belong to a union or are covered by a union contract. Workers in chain stores are more likely to be unionized or covered by contracts than workers in independent grocery stores. In independent stores, wages often are determined by job title, and increases are tied to length of job service. The United Food and Commercial Workers International Union is the primary union representing grocery store workers.

**Table 2. Median hourly earnings of the largest occupations in grocery stores, 1997**

Occupation	Grocery stores	All industries
General managers and top executives .....	\$17.67	\$26.05
First line supervisors and manager/ supervisors-sales and related occupations .....	11.95	13.43
Butchers and meat cutters .....	10.90	15.57
Bakers, bread and pastry .....	8.09	7.96
Food preparation workers .....	7.20	6.42
Stock clerks, sales floor .....	7.08	6.93
Combined food preparation and service workers .....	6.80	5.72
Salespersons, retail .....	6.78	7.23
Cashiers .....	6.32	6.22
Hand packers and packagers .....	5.65	6.90

## Outlook

Employment in grocery stores is expected to rise about 6 percent by the year 2008, compared to the 15 percent rate of growth projected for all industries combined. Many additional job openings will arise from the need to replace workers who transfer to jobs in other industries, retire, or stop working for other reasons. Replacement needs are particularly significant due to the industry's large size and the high rate of turnover among cashiers and other workers who do not choose to pursue grocery industry careers.

Employment will grow as the population increases and as more grocery stores offer a wider array of goods and services that include prescription drugs, flowers, liquor, and carryout food, as well as banking, postal, and catering services. In addition, grocery stores are adding and enhancing delicatessens, bakeries, and meat and seafood departments to counter the trend toward eating away from home. This expansion is expected to create many new jobs.

Some technological advances—such as computer scanning cash registers and automated warehouse equipment—have boosted productivity, but these innovations are not expected to severely threaten employment levels. In fact, past technological improvements like scanners and electronic data interchange are expected to improve opportunities in areas such as category management and distribution. Increasing competition from large discount department stores will encourage the industry to continue to improve its efficiency by adopting new technologies and procedures and by reducing redundancies, especially in the supply lines. However, many tasks, such as stocking shelves on the sales floor or accepting payment from customers, cannot be performed effectively by machines. In addition, many consumers have demonstrated their strong desire for personal services. For example, consumers want managers to answer questions about store policy and services; they want cashiers and courtesy clerks to answer questions, bag goods, or help them bring groceries to their cars; and they want workers in specialty departments to advise them on their purchases and fill personal orders by providing special cuts of meat, fish, or poultry.

Projected growth for some grocery store occupations differs from the slower than average growth projected for the industry as a whole. Employment of bakers and food preparation workers is expected to grow faster than average because of

the popularity of fresh baked breads and pastries, carryout food, and catering services. Employment of retail sales worker supervisors and managers is expected to grow as fast as average as new service departments and stores are built. A decline in employment of butchers and meatcutters is expected as more meat cutting and processing shifts from the retail store to the manufacturing plant.

Electronic shopping currently is gaining in popularity across the country. Its impact on the industry could be significant within the near future for both perishable and non-perishable goods, depending on how fast consumers adopt the new technology.

## Sources of Additional Information

For information on job opportunities in grocery stores, contact individual stores, the local office of the State employment service, or:

- United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, Education Office, 1775 K St. NW., Washington, DC 20006-1502. Internet: <http://www.ufcw.org>

General information on careers in retail establishments is available from:

- National Retail Federation, 325 7<sup>th</sup> Street, NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20004.  
Internet: <http://www.nrf.com>

Information on most occupations in grocery stores, including the following, appears in the 2000-01 *Occupational Outlook Handbook*:

- Advertising, marketing, and public relations managers
- Butchers and meat, poultry, and fish cutters
- Cashiers
- Chefs, cooks, and other kitchen workers
- Handlers, equipment cleaners, helpers, and labors
- Pharmacists
- Pharmacy technicians and assistants
- Purchasing managers, buyers, and purchasing agents
- Retail salespersons
- Stock clerks